

UNITED STATES ARMY CHAPLAIN SCHOOL

AMERICA'S NEWER RELIGIONS:

CHALLENGE TO CHURCH AND CHAPLAIN

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In an Army installation somewhere in the United States, a young enlisted man enters the Chaplain's office. He has come, not as one of the Chaplain's spiritual flock for religious instruction or personal counseling. Rather, he represents one of the newer non-Judeo-Christian religions which has appeared in the United States in the last twenty years. His mission is not to confront the chaplain in theological debate about the values of his religion as opposed to Christianity or Judaism. Instead, he simply asks how members of his religion who reside on the installation with him can make arrangements for worship according to their beliefs.

Perhaps only the soldier, the members of his faith group to whom he reports his conversation with the chaplain, and that particular chaplain will know what answer he takes back to his fellow religious practitioners. And only the chaplain will know what personal struggles he faced in receiving that request as he sought to balance his own spiritual searching and understanding, his denominational or faith requirements, and the regulations authorizing the use of government facilities before giving an answer to the soldier.

The chaplain faces problems in attempting accurately and adequately to answer such requests. The problem is that there are no explicit guidelines given either by the military or the chaplain's denomination or faith as to what his approach toward these newer,

non-Judeo-Christian religions ought to be. Should the newer religious groups continue growing in the seventies as they have in the past two decades, we can expect this kind of encounter to occur more frequently.¹

Noting that increase, The Army Times, a military trade newspaper, recently published the results of a religious affiliation survey of a selected group of Army personnel. For the purpose of the survey only male officer and enlisted personnel of the Army were polled, the survey not including any personnel serving within the Republic of South Vietnam. The survey startled many of the paper's readers. For while it is widely recognized that attitudes held by young people in the military are representative of the youth culture of our country, the degree to which they have embraced these newer religions was not so obvious within the military setting. Magazine articles and books had served notice that American youth no longer regarded Eastern and avant garde religions with suspicion. But the fact that our young adults were abandoning the Judeo-Christian heritage and its cultural influence in numbers so as to appear significantly on a survey was a different story. The

¹What the actual population of non-Judeo-Christian religions is in the United States is anyone's guess. As a point of departure in making an estimation, I refer to Peter Rowley's book, New Gods in America, in which he gives the following statistics as approximate membership figures:

The Church of Scientology, 600,000; Nichiren Shoshu (Sokka Gakkai), 200,000; I Ching, 125,000; The Black Muslims, 100,000; Baha'i', 100,000; Meher Baba, 7,000; Zen, 2,000; Hare Krishna, 1,500; The Process Church of Final Judgement, 200; Witchcraft, 5,000; Satanic Cults, 5,000.

survey showed the following breakdown:

RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE	OFFICERS	ENLISTED ²
Protestant	60.4%	53.6%
Buddhist	.6%	1.6%
Eastern Orthodox	.4%	1.2%
Hebrew	2.3%	.6%
Moslem	.4%	.8%
Roman Catholic	25.0%	22.0%
Other	2.4%	7.3%
None	8.5%	12.9%

To highlight some of the information in the survey, there are more Buddhist enlisted men in the U.S. Army than Jewish. Moslem enlisted men also outnumber Jewish personnel.

For the Army which, reflecting our society, has thought traditionally in terms of Protestant, Catholic, and Jew the survey was a bugle calling attention to a new milepost reached in our country's development. Military and civilian leaders of the United States, since the days of our struggle for independence, have been aware that living and working conditions, and adequate pay, are, alone, not enough for the well-being of the soldier and his family. Spiritual worship is important because it is important to those making up the Army. The soldier, no less than the

²The Army Times, 1 October 1972. Army Times Publishing Company, 475 School St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20024.

civilian, finds in spiritual worship the expression of his deepest convictions and needs, and his faith in the future under the guidance and protection of his Creator God. While the military has never related such need only to the Judeo-Christian religions, until recently there was little need to think in other terms. Now the situation is changing.

Army regulations wisely do not spell out how chaplains are to minister to military personnel and their dependents beyond the requirement for formal worship. Instead, they have left the definition of ministry to the faith or denomination the chaplain represents, plus the individual chaplain's conscience. In most cases, the Army has felt comfortable with the resulting arrangements. Now, however, some of the faith groups in the Army are "outside" the traditional American religious patterns. But there are no chaplains representing non-traditional American religions. Therefore, some of the questions we must begin to address in the Church and the military are, "What guidance can the church give the military in this matter?" "How can the military best provide for the spiritual needs of all its members?" "How far can the military go in meeting these needs?"

At this point, two considerations need to be examined. "How does the chaplain function as a religious representative within the military community?", and, "How does the Church view the avant garde and Eastern religions newly arrived on our shores?"

THE ARMY CHAPLAIN: RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATIVE

The Army chaplain serves within the military organization, first at the pleasure of the religious body he represents, then according to the needs of, and his acceptance by, the military.³ After sufficient theological training and civilian clerical experience as determined by his faith group⁴, with recommendations attesting to his ability to minister effectively without close denominational supervision, he is then examined by the military. If age requirements, physical condition, and security clearances are met, and if the needs of the military are such, the clergyman finds himself on active duty. His primary responsibility as a military chaplain, both in the eyes of his faith group and of the military, is to minister, to be a pastor, a religious representative to those among whom he serves.

Military regulations and manuals of all services define the role and mission of the clergyman in uniform in about the same terms. The Army Field Manual 16-5, entitled, The Chaplain, reads:

³My remarks are generally true of all military chaplains, but I shall confine my thoughts here to the Army chaplain. Even should a chaplain be on active duty, if, for any reason, his religious endorsing agency (the civilian church or body which qualifies him for a military ministry) withdraws its endorsement, he automatically is released from the service, usually in a very few days.

⁴Some denominations require a minimum of three years civilian pastoral experience as seasoning for the young theological school graduate prior to endorsing him for entry on active military duty.

"1-3. Status and Mission.

The chaplain is a clergyman in uniform. He represents religion in the Army. The duties of the chaplain as a religious and spiritual leader are established by law and by the ecclesiastical usages which pertain to his profession as a clergyman. The mission of the chaplain is to provide for the religious and moral needs of military personnel, their dependents and authorized civilians. He has a leading role in the deliberate and systematic cultivation of moral and spiritual forces in the Army. The chaplain stimulates and guides the growth of the spiritual and moral sense of obligation within the individual."

This is the chaplain's mission, his only mission. Here his right and obligation to be a clergyman is recognized and protected.

While the chaplain's closest personal relationships probable will be with those of his own faith group, still he ministers as a clergyman and friend to any and all who feel "attracted" to his religious and professional services, to any who seek his help. The clergyman/chaplain is a counselor as well as a religious leader. In matters of spiritual life and living, in daily life and duty, in relationships with God, family, and peers the clergyman/chaplain is sought out for advice, guidance, support and prayer by men and women of all faiths, and of none. He preaches, baptizes, marries and buries according to his denominational laws and regulations. And he helps arrange for the celebration of worship and holy days for those belonging to faith groups other than his own when they are not represented by a chaplain. But always, the individual chaplain may refuse to arrange for worship for others when to do so would violate his conscience or the particular beliefs of his own religious organization.⁵

⁵AR 165-20, 22 Aug 72, p. 2, Par 3b is the chaplain's guide and authority. Part of the problem exists in that no clear-cut definition of what constitutes a religion is offered in any of the chaplain's guidelines.

In nearly every case, however, the chaplain will go out of his way to see that all who wish have the opportunity to offer public worship to God according to their understanding and traditions.

For example, the chaplain mentioned in the introductory part of this paper will receive the serviceman's request and help him with the necessary arrangements for their worship. In most cases, that is.⁶ Appropriate worship aids and assistance in arranging the facilities will also be given. The chaplain sees this role as a demonstration of his concern for all men and their spiritual wholeness. But the chaplain often makes it a practice to seek out members of non-traditional religions represented within his unit even before they come to him, to make them aware that he knows of their existence, and will assist them as he can according to their religious needs. Should that particular chaplain, because of his beliefs, be unable to help, he will nearly always recommend another chaplain of his acquaintance to them.

For the chaplain to make available worship opportunities for members of different religions or faith groups does not imply that he must lead, or participate in, those services. His commander may require him to supervise the use of the facilities, and to insure that all agreements

⁶However, if the purpose of such a group making a request is to demonstrate support or opposition to partisan political policies such requests may be denied by decision of the installation commander. This authority to deny meeting space to the installation commander includes so-called religious groups whose beliefs or practices are such as to be divisive within the command, and would tend to cause a breakdown in loyalty, trust, and morale among the commander's troops. AR 210-10, Change 3, 1 Dec 70, Chapter 5, par. 5.

reached have been fulfilled, but the chaplain cannot be required to participate in services which violate his own beliefs or conscience.⁷

The clergyman/chaplain serves in another capacity, as a member of the military staff of his commander. This he does as a clergyman who must perform staff functions to be most effective as a religious leader to military personnel. In this role the chaplain is an advisor to his commander in the areas of religion, morale, and morals, and the well-being of personnel within the command. He is able, to a degree, to influence plans and operations, and can provide the commander input, within the limitations of privileged communications, concerning conditions and situations adversely affecting his command. Here the chaplain acts similarly to a civilian clergyman who feels some responsibility for the total life of the community to which he belongs.

As staff officers, chaplains coordinate with military duty requirements to provide opportunity for worship and wholesome social activities, on weekdays, as well as Sundays. Weekday worship, Bible study and other religious education opportunities, spiritual life retreats, chapel-sponsored coffee houses, marriage clinics, pre-marital instruction, marriage-enrichment conferences, rehabilitation for addicts and other socially dysfunctional persons, camps and conferences, all are a present

⁷As further clarification, Protestant chaplains, whatever their specific denominational affiliation, are required to lead General Protestant services, in addition to denominational services they may hold. These are arranged so as to eliminate denominational theology or bias, emphasizing only those doctrines which all Protestants hold in common.

part of the chaplain's interest and his program. To say it in fewer words, as a staff officer the chaplain works as a part of the command, and within it, to create as much of a spiritual growth atmosphere as one would find in a well-staffed civilian parish. The point is, however, that the chaplain has a place on the commander's staff. This place is not to give a stamp of approval, whether his, or the religious body with which he is affiliated, to pending or present military operations. But it does provide the chaplain opportunity and status within the organization to give spiritual ministrations to those who have left their homes and churches to serve their country wherever necessary.

It is at this point that the roles of chaplain as a religious representative and a military staff officer begin to merge. For the chaplain can and does influence the organization when the consciences and well-being of personnel are being seriously challenged or threatened by the military or the mission.⁸ Chaplains serve almost daily as a buffer between individuals and the organization, when requirements would violate consciences, or work intolerable hardships upon personnel or their dependents. Certainly other factors must be taken into consideration at this point, for the military does not exist as a benevolent institution for the welfare of its members. The requirements of the mission and the

⁸In addition, the chaplain's concern is not limited to the "friendlies" in wartime. Although his ministry is not oriented toward the enemy, the chaplain, no less than his civilian counterpart, is deeply conscious that all men are in the image of God, that we are indeed brothers whatever our nationality or politics. The "whomp" of "incoming", the cries of the wounded and dying, even the charge by the enemy, cannot erase the brutal inhumanity of man toward his brother in war. The failure of us all, not just opportunity for the military to flex its muscles, is the failure of humanity to find a lasting means of peace.

needs of the military must come first, especially during times of crisis, except in the most serious cases. The military exists, after all, to serve and protect the nation, and the national ideals and way of life we cherish; and its business is serious, sometimes unto death. But seldom is the occasion such that a person with a serious, emergency-type problem cannot be given consideration for its alleviation.

Briefly, then, the chaplain is a confessor, proclaimer, counselor, and friend reminding men that God is our great Commander, our Judge, and our Savior, and that unto Him all must finally give an accounting for their lives.

THE CHURCH AND THE NEWER RELIGIONS

The second factor is to consider the attitude of the religious institution toward newer, or Eastern, religions. After all, it is the religious institution which endorses chaplains to serve as military pastors, and guidance for their pastors on military duty would rightly come from them. How do the traditional faith groups in America view these religions newly come to our shores? In their eyes, are the newer religions partners helping to shed light on the mystery of God's works among men? Or are they unwelcome challengers to the solidly established religious order, whatever its tradition? Are members of these newer religious groups considered fellow-harvesters working the fields of the King, or "lost souls" who, unfortunately, have listened to the siren song of Satan? Obviously, there is not 100% concensus on either side.

In order to learn what various denominations of the Protestant Christian Church thinks about these Eastern and avant garde religions, I composed a letter asking thirty different denominations what instructions they give their chaplains entering military active duty with regard to non-Christian religions. I hoped to gain insight from the answers received as to how the Protestant church sees these newer religions and faith groups. I was aware also that Jews in their religion have a non-proselyting tradition, that they do not actively seek converts to Judaism. But about the others I had no hard information.

I was disappointed when only sixteen responses⁹ arrived in reply to my thirty inquiries. But my disappointment was eased somewhat by the breadth of theological thinking and social application of the Gospel. However, two of the sixteen did not address the questions asked, and one other has no chaplains on active duty.¹⁰ Of the remaining thirteen, five give their chaplains no specific guidance to characterize their relationship with non-Christian religions, or with Christians of different theological orientation. Three denominations strongly stress the ecumenical flavor which should characterize those ministering in the military situation. Of the remaining five that responded, four in their instructions, stopped just short of proselytizing while strongly stressing their belief that eternal life comes only through Jesus Christ's name. The one remaining denomination readily encourages the approaching of non-Christians with the Christian Gospel for the purpose of evangelization for Christ.¹¹

⁹Replies received were from: the Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod, the United Methodist Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Church of the Brethren, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Independent Fundamental Churches of America, the Wesleyan Church, the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Association, the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Assemblies of God, the United Church of Christ, and, the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church.

¹⁰Exerpts of different kinds of responses without denominational identification are included in the appendix.

¹¹Samples of the letters are included in the Appendix.

In addition to the letters, two denominations¹² sent pamphlets about the newer religions, outlining their understanding of them, and suggesting ways in which their membership might be approached positively by Christians. Generally, the pamphlets each describe a particular newer faith-group, its history, beliefs, and methodology, makes a critical analysis of what it does not say that Christianity does, and offers suggestions to Christians for witness.

Again, let us return to the questions posed before: "What guidance can the Christian Church give its military chaplains as they face and meet with members of the non-Christian newer religions?" "How far can the military go in meeting these needs?"¹³

Obviously, there are no simple answers. The church has a task of tremendous magnitude and importance in providing her membership and clergy (including military chaplains representing her on active duty) with specific guidance regarding an approach to the newer religions on our shores. But the time grows critical. Therefore, I offer these conclusions for consideration:

1. Christians have a grace-relationship with God who is active in history. This relationship is absolutely unique, and its significance must be kept paramount in Christian's eyes. Without this, we

¹²The Southern Baptist Convention and the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.

¹³Perspective is given to these questions by Leo Pfeffer in his book, Creeeds in Competition, 166 ff.

have very little to offer.

2. Christians need a greater appreciation of their faith and traditions, and those of their brother Christians. Out of this, their expression of Christian concern in faith and love needs to be offered: fear, anger, hatred, suspicion are not (or ought not) be the reasons for our outreach to them. All men are children of God. Our mission is to introduce them to the Father who sent His Son without condemnation because He loves us and them.

3. Newer religions are here on the North American continent. It is surprising to me they did not appear long ago. They are present in such numbers that they will be challenging our religious traditions, our faith, and our commitment (and that of our children), for a long time to come. We must take our faith more seriously and communicate it to our children more faithfully. We can no longer take it for granted that the house of our children will be Christian-oriented.

4. Christians must recognize that those coming among us wrapped in the garments of newer religions are not "little Satans", or "foreign devils". They are human beings like we, searching, even as we search, for a deeper, more perfect understanding of the nature, love, and action of God; and of how men can open themselves more fully to communication and fellowship with Him.

5. Therefore, Christians need a better understanding of, and appreciation for, the avant garde and Eastern religions. The result of this will be a greater appreciation for the fullness of Christianity,

and a better sense of how God in Christ can be presented to them.

6. Christians need spiritual exercise in faith deepening.

If other religions cause us to be in panic-stricken disarray, how much greater will be the disarray when Satan confronts us? God speaks often to men in different ways. If we have no fears about the adequacy of our faith-relationship with God in Christ, the challenge of other religious traditions and teachings will not bring us to despair. Knowing ourselves fully accepted in grace, we will accept others openly, offering our faith in love and concern to them. Christ has overcome the world! He is in no danger of being dethroned by "other gods."

Finally, I recommend to chaplains in the meantime:

1. Become aware of the newer religions; your understanding of them is important to ministry. Materials are available through your senior chaplain. This is valid material for chaplains training conferences.

2. Deliberately seek out opportunities to become acquainted with adherents to the newer religions, both to provide them with worship opportunities as needed, and to establish a basis for two-way communications with them.

3. Share these experiences of fellowship and faith with the religious body you represent to keep them informed of your opportunities for ministry.

4. Share these experiences with other chaplains. We all seek to bring people closer to God, and God closer to people. This

can be accomplished by our fellowship in faith, our trust of each other's ministry, and our cooperative ministry and outreach.

5. Pray. Pray for, about, and with those with whom you share the glory and the burden of your ministry, remembering that the Spirit reaps!

Robert E. Bell, Jr.
 ROBERT E. BELL, JR.
 CHAPLAIN (MAJ) USA
 5-16-C22-73

APPENDIX A

Following is the letter mailed to thirty Protestant denominations.

In fulfillment of a requirement of the United States Army Chaplain School, and out of my own professional interest as an Army Chaplain, I have been tasked with researching and writing a paper on the subject of America's newer religions.

The term "America's newer religions" I use to indicate those religions newly come to our shores, often with backgrounds in Oriental/Eastern religions, or those avant-garde religions or philosophies being practiced more commonly in our country which do not profess faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God as a keystone of their beliefs and practices. Examples of some of these are: The Church of Scientology, Hare Krishna, the Black Muslims, the Baha'i' faith, Nichiren Shoshu, and the Buddhist Church of New York.

In order to provide as broad a base as possible for my thinking and writing (the title of the paper is: "America's Newer Religions: Challenge to Church and Chaplain), I would be greatly appreciative if you would share with me whatever guidance your denomination gives its chaplains serving in the Armed Forces regarding their efforts at evangelizing or proselytizing men and women of other denominations or religions, especially non-Christian religions, to include the Jews.

The object of the paper is to form some kind of consistent rationale within the Army Chaplaincy as an approach to members of non-Christian religions, and the chaplain's responsibility for making available resources and facilities where members of non-Christian religions may meet for worship and fellowship.

This is a large problem, and one that is growing more complex as membership in these religions increases, especially among the youth of America. We are attempting to provide general guidance for chaplains, and especially to initiate discussion among chaplains and churches, so that when pressures begin to mount, we may have some plan, some guidance for meeting it.

I hope that you will give consideration to this request, as a step being made to deal rationally, faithfully, and consistently with the problem.

Fraternally yours,

ROBERT E. BELL, JR.
Chaplain (M4J) USA

APPENDIX B

Following are samples of letters received from sixteen Protestant denominations.

Sample A - Letter Number 3

January 12, 1973

Chaplain (MAJ) Robert E. Bell, Jr.
Box # 172, USACHS
Fort Hamilton, N.Y. 11252

Dear Chaplain Bell:

Thank you very much for your letter of December 6th which regrettably went unanswered due to a clerical error. I cannot answer your direct concern, since, in fact, our Chaplains receive no instruction at efforts of proselytizing persons of other religions. Perhaps you are aware of the fact that our Church repeatedly protested proselytizing efforts, since we have been, more often than not, victimized by such efforts on the part of others. We would be most pleased to know of the results of your study if you would be kind enough to send a copy when it is completed.

I will be pleased to send you under separate cover a preliminary set of Ecumenical Guidelines for our clergy which deal with inter-Christian relations. This might be of some value to your study.

With all best wishes to you and success in your work, I remain

Sample B - Letter Number 6

December 20, 1972

Chaplain (MAJ) Robert E. Bell, Jr., USA
Box 172, USACHS
Fort Hamilton, New York 11252

Dear Chaplain Bell:

Enclosed are the pamphlets which are used as manuals for (.)
for guidance of chaplains and service personnel in the Armed Forces.
In no way are the chaplains encouraged to proselytize any personnel
belonging to some other denomination or faith.

Wishing you God's blessings and peace for this Christmas and the
coming New Year.

Sample C - Letter Number 13

December 21, 1972

Chaplain (MAJ) USA Robert E. Bell, Jr.
Box 172 USACHS
Fort Hamilton, New York 11252

Dear Brother Bell:

We believe that Jesus Christ, the Lord, is our one and only Savior. "There is one mediator between God and man -- the man, Christ -- (1 Tim 2:5) Jesus." There is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby man must be saved. He is "the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father except by Him." (John 14:6)

It is the position of the (.) in the light of the above quoted statements that anyone who does not believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord is a candidate and prospect for Christianity and the Kingdom of God.

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1. Army Times. 1 October 1972.
2. Pfeffer, Leo. Creeds in Competition. (New York: Harper and Row, n.d.).
2. Rowley, Peter. New Gods in America. (New York: McKay and Co., 1971).